

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on Education Technology in
Union City, New Jersey
February 15, 1996

The President. Thank you very much, Carol. Good morning, Secretary Riley. You look great long distance there—[laughter]—glad you're in the Cabinet. Good morning, Bob Fazio, and thank you again for what you said and for the remarkable work you have done here. I want to say hello to Senator Lautenberg and Congressman Menendez, who had so much to do with starting this technology effort in this school system; and to Jim Cullen at Bell Atlantic, and the others who are here from the private sector; and the teachers, the parents, and especially the students who are here; and the students from the 65 schools in Hudson, Bergen, and Morris Counties who are with us today, thanks to technology. I want to say hello to all of you.

I have been looking forward to this for some time. And the Vice President and I have had some very exciting conversations about what we would see here and what all of you have done here. And I want to just begin by thanking all of you for making this kind of partnership work and by proving what I said in the State of the Union, that we have an obligation if we want all Americans to have the opportunities that this new information and technology age offers, we have an obligation to make sure that all of our children have access to world-class education through the finest technology. And you are doing that. And I'm very, very proud of you, and I'm very excited to listen to all of you and what you have to say today.

But I would like to talk a little bit about what we are trying to do. What we're trying to do from the White House is to work in partnership with everybody in America who is concerned about this to see that by the year 2000 every classroom and every library in the entire United States is hooked up to the information superhighway, that all our children have access to computers and the finest educational software and all of our teachers have the kind of training and support that obviously you have provided here, and that there is the kind of connection that we see here.

I am very excited about the prospects that young people like those here at this table in this room will be able to learn things that I

could never have even dreamed of as a child. And while I want districts like yours to be able to stand out and be proud, I think all of you want every child to have the opportunities that your children have.

And that's why I wanted to come here to announce what our next steps are. As I said in the State of the Union, when I outlined the importance of meeting the challenge of providing all of our children an education for the 21st century, one of the primary goals I set was making sure every classroom was hooked up to the information superhighway by the year 2000. Today I am proposing and will include in my budget to the Congress a \$2 billion technology literacy challenge that will put the future at the fingertips of every child in every classroom in the United States. Let me explain just briefly how it will work.

We'll basically do what you have done here in Union City on a national level. We will use the resources of State and local governments and school districts, of the private sector, the schools, the students, the parents, and the teachers. The proposal is part of the balanced budget plan, as I said, I sent to Congress, and we will use these funds basically as challenge grants to try to make sure that no school district, no matter how poor, no matter how urban or rural, will be denied the opportunity to do what your children have been able to do because of your vision and work.

I ask for all the people in this country who will support this effort to get active, to get involved. Companies like Bell Atlantic can do a great deal, but they can also use a lot more help. And obviously, none of this will happen unless the school and the parents support the endeavor.

So we're going to try to do our part. We want to support you. And we look forward to the day when we can have a conversation like this and every school child in America can be a part of it.

Now I'd like to turn this over to our high-tech Vice President who has educated me—between the Vice President and my daughter, I'm about to figure out this modern age. [Laughter]

And I want to thank them both and introduce the Vice President and thank him for all the work he has done in this important area.

[The Vice President compared President John F. Kennedy's initiative in America's early space program with President Clinton's initiative to link schools to the information superhighway.]

The President. Thank you.

Let me just say one other word and then we'll go back to the planned rotation. Bob Fazio said something that sparked a warm response in me and reminded me that technology is only as good as the people who are using it, and in the service of education, it's only as good as the educators who are committed to educating our children.

And he introduced himself as the instructional leader of this school. Having worked now for almost 20 years in the field of education reform and having had the opportunity as a Governor to travel all across America, to go into many of our country's finest schools, it wasn't so many years ago that there were almost no principals in America who would have introduced themselves as the instructional leaders of their schools. They thought of themselves as managers, people who kept order and made sure the books balanced and did all kinds of things that were unrelated almost to what was going on in the classroom. And the reason this technology initiative is working here is because, from the principal to the teachers, people understand what the mission is.

And I wanted to thank you. That was a statement that people that haven't spent a lot of time in classrooms might not have even paid any attention to, but to me it meant more than anything else you said. And I thank you for that because it's important for all us who are trying to put this equipment at the fingertips of our educators to remember that what happens then is the magic between the teachers, the children, and the parents. And I thank you for what you said.

Mr. Fazio. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Mr. Vice President, who is going to go next?

[Mr. Fazio introduced a teacher who described how her school used technology and commented that she was nervous.]

The President. You're doing great.

[The teacher said that the President's initiative was important to Union City students because many could not afford home computers.]

The President. Thank you.

[The Vice President introduced a participant who commented that learning computer skills in grammar school would give students an advantage in high school and college.]

The President. Let me ask you something. Why do you think that students here are doing better now, like on test scores and things like that, than they would have done if there had been no technology here? What do you think the most important thing is about technology?

[The participant said that computers gave students immediate access to current information and more time to study, without regard to economic class.]

The President. That's right. Do you think that having access to the computer makes all children believe that they're equal, that they can have equal aspirations because it's an equalizer across income, isn't it?

Participant. Yes, it is.

The President. Is it also more fun?

Participant. Yes.

The President. Do you think that has something to do with why people learn more, because it's more fun? *[Laughter]*

Participant. Yes, I do.

The President. That's not bad, that's okay. You can say that. *[Laughter]* It doesn't have to be hard; it can be fun.

[The Vice President introduced a participant from Bergen Academy who described how partnerships were created between businesses, schools, and professionals to bring technology into the schools and community. He said that technology made teaching more exciting and he woke up every morning not knowing what was going to happen.]

The President. It is like our job. *[Laughter]*

[The participant said that rather than being a teacher, he now was a facilitator, a teammate in solving problems. He then introduced two students who described their computer projects, including an effort to put a biovisualization and 3-D gallery on the Internet.]

The President. Tell us what biovisualization is. For all of us mere mortals, we'd like to know what that means. [Laughter]

[A participant described the project of electronically reproducing specimens from the Smithsonian Institution. Other students then described and demonstrated their projects.]

The President. That's great.

[Parent Luciano Calles explained that the program motivated children and exposed families to the education process.]

The President. Thank you very much.

[The Vice President introduced parent Louis Clements, who described parental cooperation with faculty and school administrators to expand the program.]

The President. Thank you very much, Lou, and thank you, Mr. Calles. I want to just comment very briefly. I think if every school in America had 75 to 80 percent parental participation, we wouldn't have half the problems we've got, and we'd have a lot more computers in the schools a lot faster. I thank you for that.

And I wanted to say to you, Mr. Calles, one of the things that you said that meant a great deal to me personally was that you thought it had helped at home, too—the atmosphere of education at home. I mean, I gather you feel that you have a higher level of security about your child's education, and you feel more involved in it because of this technology project.

[Mr. Calles said that his children taught their parents to use the home computer and that school administrators communicated with parents at home using E-mail.]

The President. Do you have a lot of parents who communicate through E-mail now?

[Mr. Fazio affirmed that it provided an opportunity to reach parents who could not come to the school.]

The President. I'd like to call on Jim Cullen, the vice chairman of Bell Atlantic. Bell Atlantic has been an indispensable part in this project here at Christopher Columbus in Union City. I want to thank you, but I'd like for you to talk about your role, why you did it, and what you think the future holds.

[Mr. Cullen described the process of electronically linking schools with outside resources. He

noted that the Telecommunications Act of 1996 encouraged the establishment of electronic links to educational institutions and libraries. The Vice President said that the President was responsible for that part of the legislation.]

The President. Explain to everybody what is in it, though, so that——

[The Vice President summarized the legislation, emphasizing the challenge grants to create public-private partnerships. Mr. Cullen then said he expected that corporations would be eager to participate.]

The President. Jim, I want to hear from Congressman Menendez and Senator Lautenberg and the mayor and Secretary Riley about their perspectives on this and their involvement with it, because they all have been involved. But just before I do, I'd like to ask you to just touch once more on something that has come up several times today that comes up in other places where I've been—I was in Concord, New Hampshire, several days ago, 2 days after they connected all the schools in their community—and that is the challenge of making sure that children have access and their parents have access to computers and to being hooked in when they're at home. How important do you think that is? Could you say again, very briefly, what steps you took to do that, just to emphasize that for the people that are listening here, because this is one thing that's going to require an extra amount of effort in several places in the United States to get this done. And so if you could just—and maybe, Bob, you might want to comment a little bit—but if you could just talk briefly about it, and then we'll go to our public officials.

[Mr. Cullen summarized the vision of the information superhighway, concluding that it had the potential to be available around the clock in schools, small businesses, and homes.]

The President. But it's important to hammer that home. I mean, the ultimate vision of this is that the reach of the information superhighway will equal the reach of telephones and television here. It will be in every house.

[A participant reported that Mayor Bruce Walter's vision was to open the public library to on-line users as a way of providing a safe haven for children.]

The President. Congressman and Senator and mayor?

[*Representative Robert Menendez said New Jersey was willing to work with the President to move the rest of the Nation onto the information superhighway.*]

The President. Great.
Senator?

[*Senator Frank Lautenberg emphasized that technological advances had sharpened students' learning abilities and concluded by thanking the President and the Vice President.*]

The President. Mayor, I'd like to let you speak last, so let me interject here and call on Secretary Riley out there in cyberspace to ask if he has any comments.

[*Secretary of Education Richard Riley discussed the role of Government as a leader and supporter of technology initiatives.*]

The President. Thank you very much. And thank you for your leadership to make sure that's exactly what we did.

Mr. Mayor?

[*Mayor Bruce Walter discussed the role of local government and concluded by thanking the President and the Vice President.*]

The President. Thank you.
Mr. Vice President?

[*The Vice President reviewed the concept of universal service as it would apply to computer communications and thanked the participants for demonstrating the future. A participant then invited the President and the Vice President to continue the discussion at another location.*]

The President. We will do that. But before we get up from this table I want to leave you with one final thought to muse about, and I hope not only all of you but all the people who will read or see about this—as President, I have said repeatedly, I believe—when it comes to the American people I have two great objectives, and that is to do everything that we can do to make the American dream available to every person who is willing to work for it, and secondly, to do it in a way that brings the American people together instead of divide them.

Technology has been a big part of this debate. Technology clearly here is uniting us and moving us forward. Erika said it: It doesn't matter where you come from, doesn't matter who your

family is. And Luciano said it: You can be an immigrant family; you can bring a computer there; you can have access to the information. People—all people can have high expectations for themselves, no matter what their income background, no matter what their roots are, they can do that. This is bringing us together and moving us forward.

If you look beyond the schooling years, there are lots of people who are afraid that technology is doing the reverse. In our economy, where we have global information and global markets and breathtaking changes in productivity, you read every day—and I have talked about it in my State of the Union Address—we have almost 8 million new jobs, but half the country hasn't gotten a raise and a lot of people are wondering what will happen to them if their big company becomes a smaller company because of information productivity.

What I want the American people to see about this is that when we complete the work of bringing the information superhighway to all education and to all of our people, it will empower everybody, and it will close the circle, and it will enable us to use these great new forces of the modern world to bring all of America together and to move all of America forward.

You know, you can't turn around and go back. This will carry us forward. And I think it's a very, very great thing for our country. And some day, when Erika is about our age thinking about her children and her grandchildren, we will look upon what you are doing as the beginning of a great renewal of American society that goes even far beyond education and proves that we can make this technology our friend and reinforce the American dream and give everybody a chance to live up to their own dreams.

And you are real pioneers, and I'm very grateful to you. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in a classroom at Christopher Columbus Junior High School. In his remarks, he referred to Carol Lisa, principal, Bergen Academy for the Advancement of Science and Technology, and Bob Fazio, principal, Christopher Columbus Junior High School. A portion of this discussion could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.